

An essay on

Dysentery.

Respectfully submitted.

to the Faculty of the

Homoeopathic Medical College.

of Pennsylvania.

on the  
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One thousand Eight hundred & fifty two.

by

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of Pennsylvania.



Dysentery is an inflammation of the intestines, especially of the colon and rectum.

gnosis. The characteristic symptoms are, frequent inclination to evacuate the bowels, violent griping and cutting pains in the abdomen. The discharges consist either of mucus, or of mucus mixed with blood, or of pure blood; there is tenesmus, before, during, and after the evacuation. There is generally some fever with thirst, and also gastric derangement. If the large intestines are affected, which is most frequently the case, the discharges consist either of pure mucus, or of mucus mixed with blood, or of pure blood, and the tenesmus is more severe after the evacuation. While, if the inflammation is seated in the small intestines, the discharges consist of a dark watery substance mixed with sanguineous mucus, which has a very offensive odor, and the tenesmus, cutting and griping pains,



which are frequently accompanied with burning in the abdomen and anus, subside after the evacuation.

The stools vary in quantity and frequency. There may be from ten to seventy discharges in twenty four hours, and in very bad cases, there is a constant urging and straining, with very little or no discharge.

Causes. A predisposition to dysentery is produced by the continued influence of heat, augmenting the excitability of the alimentary mucous membrane, disordering the hepatic function, and relaxing the surface of the body so as to render it more susceptible to the influence of cold. Substances directly irritant in their action on the bowels are frequent exciting causes, among these may be mentioned, unripe and acid fruits, or ripe fruits in too large quantities, Vegetables,



and unwholesome and indigestible food of all kinds;  
acids and imperfectly fermented alcoholic drinks,  
such as cider, weak wines, malt liquors, &c. &c. putrid  
Water, purgatives; Worms, and other accumula-  
tions in the large intestines. Exhalations from  
putrid animal substances, and Vegetable mias-  
mata, are also among the causes. Of the  
exciting causes however, cold especially when  
combined with moisture is the most common.

Hence the frequency of dysentery among per-  
sons exposed to the cold dampness of night,  
after having been much heated during the  
day.

Dysentery is not infrequently epidemic, prevail-  
ling in some instances over considerable extents  
of country, but more commonly confined within  
small, and sometimes very accurately defined  
limits. In this form, it often occurs in different



parts of the United States. It is especially apt to prevail in miasmatic districts, preceding or accompanying intermittent and remittent fevers, but sometimes it cannot be traced to any local cause.

The question has been much agitated, whether dysentery is a contagious disease. It is now almost universally agreed, that it is not so in its ordinary form. In certain confined situations, where many dysenteric patients are crowded together, without due attention to cleanliness, and ventilation, the disease appears to be communicated to others who may be exposed, but the result is probably owing to the influence rather of putrid exhalations, which are acknowledged to be capable of producing dysentery, than to any really contagious effluvia.

Dysentery attacks indiscriminately persons of both sexes and all ages, if one class of individuals



is affected more frequently than another, it is probably owing to their greater exposure to the causes of the disease.

It is much more prevalent in summer and autumn than in winter, and in hot, than in temperate climates.

Prognosis. This depends to a considerable extent on the individual character of the patient, as chronic affections are sometimes roused by an attack of dysentery, which may complicate the disease, and make the prognosis more or less doubtful; although the termination of the disease does not depend exclusively upon this complication, but also upon the severity of the dysentery, and upon the constitution of the patient himself.

As the disease increases, an excessive quantity of putrid bilious substances is expelled from the system, and the patient is extremely debilitated.



All these symptoms may occasion death, if the patient be not carefully treated; and the most unfavourable prognosis has to be given, if a sudden cessation of the intense pain, sunken countenance, coldness of the extremities, a small intermittent pulse, fetid evacuations, which the patient passes without consciousness, indicate the setting in of mortification.

This fortunately happens very seldom if ever, under a strict and skillful Homoeopathic treatment.

*Anatomical* The mucous membrane of the large intestine, *character*, always shows signs of inflammation in case of death from dysentery. This membrane is swollen, reddened and injected, and not infrequently ulcerated.

Numerous divisions of this disease, have been made by authors, such as: acute and chronic,



mild and malignant; sporadic, endemic, epidemic &c.

But as they are of no practical importance, I shall adopt that division, which has been made according to the character, that the disease may assume; — which is as follows:

1. Catarrhal, or rheumatic Dysentery.
2. Inflammatory. "
3. Bilious. "
4. Typhoid, or putrid. "

tment. I now come to the treatment of dysentery, commencing with naming the remedies which have been used against the various forms of the disease generally. The principal remedies are: Merc. cor. sub. Merc. sol. Acon. Ars. Aloe. Bell. Bry. Carb. v. Colocy. Chin. Colch. Caps. Cham. Canth. Sals. Ipe. Nux. v. Hep. Puls. Rhus. t. Staph. Sulph. Sulph. a. Phos. a. Nitr. a.



and Verat.

This is rather a formidable array of remedies for the cure of one disease; some ignorant Proct<sup>n</sup>ist would no doubt say. But to such a one, I will reply, that dysentery is not a constant disease, like Croup, or Pleuritis, where one or two remedies are always positively indicated; but that it assumes different shades in different individuals, and in order to meet those various forms, we must necessarily be in possession of a great number of remedies.

If old school Physicians would pay more attention to individualization, instead of generalization, they would not be so apt to render themselves ridiculous, by vaunting a remedy to the sky as a panacea, which they are forced to throw aside, in a very short time, as utterly worthless. Such is the history of the old school



of Medicine!

This subject being well understood by Homoeopaths, it is not necessary for me to enlarge upon it.

Having divided the disease into four classes, I will now give the remedies for each class, but as the different varieties are often to be found complicated or intermixed with each other, it may naturally be supposed, that the same remedies will frequently be indicated.

1. Catarrhal or rheumatic dysentery, is characterized, by drawing and shooting stitches in the muscles, and extremities, tearing in the neck, head, and shoulders. The fever is not very violent, nor are the digestive functions very much deranged. There is pain in the bowels, with tenesmus, the evacuations generally consist of mucus, streaked with blood. This kind of dysentery occurs generally during an



epidemic, but it may also exist as a sporadic dis-  
ease. It is found endemic in those districts where  
the locality makes intermittent fever likewise  
endemic. If the attack can be traced to an atmos-  
pheric influence, the principle remedy is China. cr.  
especially if the fever is of an intermittent charac-  
ter. If on the other hand, the rheumatic symptoms  
should predominate, Acon. Bry. Cham. Sulc.  
Nerc. sol. Puls. or Rhus. t. would be indicated,  
and one or more of these remedies have to be  
selected, according to their adaptation to the case.

2. Inflammatory dysentery, is characterized by  
all the symptoms of inflammatory fever, it  
generally commences with a chill, followed  
by a dry burning heat, and great thirst, the  
tongue and skin are dry, and the urine high  
colored. This kind of dysentery is very similar  
to catarrhs, as the abdomen in both these dis-



cases is hot and distended, and very sensitive to the touch. The patient has nausea, vomiting, and cold extremities. Inflammatory dysentery prevails generally at the end of summer, and the beginning of autumn, when the days are hot and the nights cool.

The first thing we have to consider in the treatment of this form of dysentery, is the fever, for the removal of which we have to administer Acon. in repeated doses. If this remedy does not prove sufficient, Bell. should be administered. When the fever has been subdued by these remedies, one of the following remedies will have to be selected, in order to remove the dysenteric symptoms. Merc. cor. subl. Merc. sol. Nux. vom. or Aloe.

3. Bilious dysentery, is characterized by the fetid smell and putrid bilious nature of the discharges. Bilious and catarrhal-rheumatic



dysenteries are more frequently met with, than any other. They begin with all the symptoms of a bilious fever. The discharges are frequent, and consist of a fetid green or brown bile, frequently mixed with bloody mucus, there is severe colic and tenesmus, with great restlessness. Bilious dysentery is somewhat similar to the inflammatory variety, and occurs most generally as an epidemic disease, at the end of summer, and the beginning of autumn, when the days are hot, and the nights cool.

In this form of dysentery, we shall also have to resort to Acon. in order to subdue the febrile symptoms, afterwards we must administer one of the following remedies, which are more specific for the generality of the case: Cham. Colocy. Colch. Ipe. Merc. sol. & cos. subl. Aloe. or Pell.

Colocynthis and the Mercurial preparations, would



no doubt be first indicated, but this each individual case will have to decide. In case the disease should become protracted, Sulphur, ought to be administered, either alone, or in alternation with some of the other appropriate remedies. Aloe, a remedy, as yet not as extensively used as it should be, will no doubt be found a valuable remedy in this disease, for we find in its pathogenetic effects, violent colic with bloody stools, it ought therefore be used in those cases. Other remedies such as Caps. Nitric. a. Hepar. Staph. & Verat. may also come in play.

H. Typhoid, or putrid dysentery, is characterized, by an aggravated state of all the symptoms above described, by great debility, profuse dark and excessively fetid stools, dry brown tongue, excessive thirst, very rapid and scarcely perceptible pulse. There is generally violent colic with burning



pain in the abdomen and anus, with severe straining, before an evacuation. The remedies for this form of dysentery are: Arsenic. Aloe. Carb. veg. Chin. Nux. vom. Phos. a. Nitr. a. Rhs. t. Sulph. a. & Musc. cr. subl.

This kind of dysentery, can never occur under a judicious Homoeopathic treatment, and it can only be the consequence of a gross neglect of the patient himself, or of an erroneous medicinal treatment.

The medicine may be administered every one, two, three, or four, hours, according to the severity of the case, but as soon as considerable improvement takes place, the intervals may be lengthened.

In reference to the proper doses, it is sufficient to say, that the experience of a majority of practitioners, is in favour of the lower potencies;



but as many may have been perhaps equally as successful with the higher, it must therefore be left to the discrimination of the physician, to choose what attenuation he thinks best.

it. The diet in dysentery, must be of a farinaceous nature, all animal food, fruits and Vegetables must be strictly prohibited. Cold Water and ice, in very small quantities, may occasionally be allowed, but the best drink in this disease, is no doubt rice and barley Water.

Having given a general view of dysentery, it will not, I presume be out of place here, to give a short history of an epidemic of this disease, which prevailed during the last summer and autumn in the City of Lancaster. So malignant was its character, that during the months of July, August, and September, there were from four to six funerals daily, mostly of Children,



all of whom fell victims of Allopathic treatment. I am happy to say however, that although I had upwards of sixty cases under treatment I lost none.

The most constant symptoms, were: slight fever, cutting and griping pain in the abdomen, tenesmus before, during, and after evacuation.

The discharges consisted generally of sanguine, or mucus, sometimes also of pure blood. For those symptoms, Mercur. sol. was the specific, I generally gave the 3<sup>rd</sup> trit. one grain every three to four hours. To very young Children, I gave the 4<sup>th</sup> potentia, with the happiest effect.

Where the fever was somewhat considerable, I gave a dose or two of Aconit, before the Merc. sol. was administered. Those who applied to me, before they had taken other medicines, were generally cured with six, or eight doses, but if



They had taken for several days castor oil and Laudanum, the remedies generally prescribed by old school Physicians; somewhat more medicine was required, but they were generally well in from four to six days. I had also a few very bad cases of putrid dysentery; I will relate one case in particular.

A young Lady, had been ill with dysentery for five or six days, she had taken during that time repeated doses of castor oil and Laudanum, without any good effect, for she grew worse from day to day, so that at last they sent for me. I found her laboring under the following symptoms: pulse rapid and full, fever and chillings, dry mouth and tongue, which was coated brown, great thirst, burning from the throat through to the anus, pain in the limbs, severe cutting and griping pain in the abdomen without intermission,



The latter was very sore to the touch, violent tenesmus, with dark fetid discharges; she had to go to stool nearly every twenty minutes, but sometimes discharged very little. She had taken no nourishment for four, or five days, and was therefore exceedingly weak. This was a very bad case, every body that saw her, despaired of her recovery.

I gave her Aconit. 3. pot. a few doses, which soon relieved the fever, then Mercur. cor. subl. one grain of the first trit. in a half a tumbler full of Water, a tea spoon full of it every hour; this aggravated the burning very much, she said the burning increased after every spoon full of the medicine, but it relieved the pain and tenesmus, and also lessened the frequency of the evacuations. I gave her then during the night Sach. Lactis; when I saw her the next morning, the burning had nearly subsided, but the discharges were



still dark and offensive. I now gave her Ars. 6. pot.  
and Carb. veg. 10 pot. alternately, every three hours,  
which soon changed the evacuation to a sanguinous  
mucus. The fetid smell had entirely disappeared,  
there was no more burning, the mouth became  
moist, there was no more thirst, and she had  
also some appetite; she had still tenismus,  
but only during and after evacuation, which  
now took place only every three or four hours.  
I now gave her Merc. sol. one grain of the  
3<sup>rd</sup> trit. every three or four hours, and as she  
improved, at longer intervals; In about five  
days, after taking the Merc. sol. she was quite free  
of dysentery, only a painless diarrhoea of a thin  
yellowish fluid remaining, for which I gave her  
China, which cured her in a few days.

I am happy to say, that in ten days, from the  
time I first saw her, she was able to be up, and



needed no more medicine.

In several cases, after the sanguineous mucus discharges ceased, there was still tenesmus with discharges of small hard knotty faeces, for which I gave a few doses of Nux. vom. 8. pot. which cured them perfectly in a very short time.

In most cases however, or more particularly in the severer ones, there remained a painless diarrhoea, of a yellow, or whitish color after the dysentery had subsided; during which time, they felt however very well, and had generally a very good appetite. For those of a yellow color, I gave Chin. 3.<sup>rd</sup> pot. and for those of a whitish Sulphur, 3.<sup>rd</sup> trit. which always cured them in a few days.

The striking contrast between the Homoeopa<sup>tic</sup>, this and Allopathic treatment in this epidemic, was calculated one would naturally suppose to make an impression among the Citizens of



Lancaster, in favor of Homoeopathia. To some extent this has been the case, but only among those, who were already favorably inclined towards it; but who still doubted its efficacy in very acute or urgent cases. Those I say were strengthened in their faith, and are now firm believers in the doctrine of Hahnemann.

But among the mass, who seem to be hardened and blinded, it made little or no impression.

This however can be accounted for; as there are interests existing, which binds them to their old Family Physicians, which they lack moral courage to sever.

It is therefore obvious, that the present generation will have to pass away, before the principle of Similia Similibus, Curantur, will be fully and universally acknowledged as the only principle in Medicine, by which diseases can be



radically cured. That this period will come,  
is certain, and that it may soon come, and  
that the fruits of our noble System be en-  
joyed by the suffering mankind of the  
whole World, is the fervent prayer of

Christian Ermann.